



**Speech by U.S. Ambassador Lewis Lukens
at the donation ceremony of the company TOMS shoes
to vulnerable children in Senegal
Mbao on July 16, 2013**

(As prepared)

- Minister of Education
- Representatives of partner ministries and other state bodies
- Representatives of technical and financial partners
- Representatives of the private sector
- Representatives of civil society
- Director of Operations at FHI 360
- Representative of TOMS shoes
- Ladies and gentlemen

It is with great pleasure that I am here to co-chair today's ceremony with Minister of Education Sergine Mbaye Thiam as we mark today's partnership between the U.S. government and a prominent American shoemaker to provide humanitarian assistance to some of Senegal's most vulnerable young residents.

Today's donation of shoes here in Mbao, a gift from the TOMS shoe company, launches the distribution in the coming weeks of more than 60,000 pairs of shoes to students in daaras across the country.

This gesture, generated with the assistance of USAID's Basic Education project, will help tens of thousands of children who might not otherwise have the protection afforded by shoes against infection and injury as they go through their daily lives.

In addition to the health benefits, wearing a decent pair of new shoes can also provide youth with a measure of self-esteem and confidence that may have been previously lacking.

The founder of TOMS shoes, a young man named Blake Mycoskie, saw countless children walking barefoot on a trip to South America back in 2006.

This touched him and inspired him to establish a for-profit company that took corporate social responsibility to a whole new level: to donate one pair of shoes to a child in need for every one the company sold, known as One-for-One.

Today, TOMS has donated more than 10 million pairs of shoes in 60 countries across the world.

In Senegal, it is our hope – manifested in the work by our USAID project in partnership with about 350 daaras – that students continue on into mainstream education following the completion of their Koranic education.

In these daaras, USAID is working with marabouts and teachers to help them provide basic competence in reading, mathematics, and geography, to the benefit of more than 17,000 Koranic students.

We have also counseled more than 2,500 additional daara students on the benefits of staying in school, and provided professional training for nearly 6,500 more students from mainstream schools near the end of their education.

To be sure, good education makes for good citizens. It is a pathway toward the prosperous, productive life and good citizenship we wish for all young residents of Senegal.

Absent the knowledge and cognitive skills afforded by a good education, young people are at a disadvantage as they plan their families and participate in commerce, and may find themselves overwhelmed when attempting to meet the challenges life presents.

Of course, shoes would not even be an issue in relation to daara students, without reference to some of them seen begging in the streets, barefoot.

This long-standing, intractable social issue in Senegal must be primarily by the people and the government of Senegal.

As a bilateral donor to Senegal, the United States supports the government's ongoing efforts to eradicate street begging, and is providing assistance to TOMS in making this charitable gesture, which will play a small part in helping improve the health, hygiene, and self-confidence of these vulnerable populations.

Across the world, TOMS is setting a significant example for the private sector in terms of humanitarian assistance and corporate social responsibility. On behalf of the U.S. government, I thank you for your generosity in providing humanitarian assistance where it is most needed.

Through USAID and other U.S. government programs, the American people have always held partnership as a guiding principle in its cooperation with Senegal, and will continue to help assist the private sector on the international and national levels in the implementation of all its various programs of social responsibility.

Thank you for your kind attention.